STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
MEMBER
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING OF THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

U.S. Competitiveness: The Innovation Challenge
Thursday July 21, 2005, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

As a firm believer that innovation is the key to U.S. economic growth, vitality, and national security, I am pleased that the Science Committee is holding this important hearing. One of my top priorities in Congress has been to educate other Members about innovation and foster policies that enhance it. The United States is on the cutting edge of global competition because of our past investments in science and technology. Whether we remain in that position depends on how well we understand the drivers of innovation and how we choose to respond.

There are many ways we can foster innovation and competitiveness at the national level, but some are less obvious than others. I have consistently advocated for two main goals: increased funding across the Federal agencies that support fundamental research; and strengthening math and science education in our current and future workforce. Economists attribute more than half the economic growth in the past 50 years to technological innovation. Federally funded basic research has been responsible for groundbreaking technologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), the global positioning system (GPS), human genome mapping, fiber optics, lasers, and the Internet. Bolstering our workforce requires improving current training programs and strengthening core math and science teaching and curricula throughout our K-12 system. In the House I co-chair the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education Caucus, a member organization that works to support STEM Education at all levels. Improving the science literacy of our current and future workforce will ensure the quality of our intellectual infrastructure. In addition to the ways I have mentioned, we must continue to be aware of other areas that impact the innovation process and maintain Congressional awareness and support of those areas.

I have been working on these issues for some time now. In 2002, as Chairman of the Science Committee's Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards, I held a hearing about innovation in manufacturing. Following that hearing I developed the Manufacturing Technology Competitiveness Act, which passed the House overwhelmingly in the 108th Congress. Unfortunately the Senate did not have time to take it up last year, but we are at it again even stronger this time around and expect this year's bill, H.R. 250, to be on the House floor soon. The Manufacturing Technology Competitiveness Act authorizes the highly successful Manufacturing Extension Partnership program. This Federal-state partnership program, run by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), provides expert advice to small and medium-sized manufacturers who want to improve their processes to remain competitive. My manufacturing bill also establishes collaborative research programs at NIST that would foster partnerships between small and large manufacturers, academic researchers, and other partners to do manufacturing-specific research.

I know that today's witnesses will share personal experiences and creative ideas on ways we can promote an environment of innovation to maintain U.S. competitiveness across all

sectors of the economy. I am happy to see the Committee has invited representatives of both the business and the academic communities, because there are no "islands of innovation" and I believe new partnerships between traditionally separate communities will be important for future innovation. I look forward to learning from all of our witnesses how we might make government, industry, academia and others work together as a team for creative innovation.